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FOR SECRETARY CLINTON FROM AMBASSADOR RIVKIN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [FR](#) [AF](#) [IS](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR YOUR VISIT TO PARIS ON JANUARY 29,  
2010

Classified By: Ambassador Charles Rivkin for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C/NF) Madam Secretary: President Sarkozy, Foreign Minister Kouchner, and U.S Embassy Paris look forward to welcoming you on your first bilateral trip to France as Secretary of State. Your visit is taking place at a time that many consider to be one of the best periods in Franco-American relations. Coming on the heels of the highly visible London conference on Afghanistan, we anticipate intense media interest in you, your visit, and the speech you will be making on European security issues. Your meetings with the President, National Security Advisor, and Foreign Minister, as well as your policy speech, will help us reinforce the need for increased French engagement in Afghanistan, consolidate support for next steps on Iran, manage expectations on the Middle East peace process, exchange latest views on Russia and China, promote cooperation on Haiti humanitarian assistance and work toward our counter-terrorism and non-proliferation goals. Your visit will also be an opportunity to demonstrate our close ties with two publicly "pro-American" French leaders and to express deep appreciation of France as a major bilateral partner on global issues. End Summary.

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DOMESTIC SITUATION  
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¶2. (C/NF) President Sarkozy will not face re-election until 2012 and his UMP party currently controls both houses of Parliament. His domestic political opposition remains divided and leaderless. Regional elections scheduled for late March will test Sarkozy's continuing levels of political support, and we are seeing increased political posturing as those campaigns get underway nationwide. Responsibility for foreign affairs decisions is highly concentrated in the activist French President, whose impatience with slower diplomatic processes is legendary. Sarkozy is a firm believer that it takes the personal intervention of leaders to cut through bureaucratic resistance and to achieve necessary results, a worldview that pre-disposes him to propose high-level summits on everything from the Middle East to European security. Despite their differing personalities and political parties, Kouchner and Sarkozy have developed a good working relationship, with Kouchner supporting his President and carving out complementary areas of responsibility, focusing on humanitarian affairs, the Balkans, Africa, and Syria-Lebanon. While there is some media speculation about a possible cabinet

re-shuffle after the March elections, any final decision on the Foreign Minister's portfolio will have to take into account that Kouchner remains one of the most popular politicians in France. Both Sarkozy and Kouchner, as well as NSA Levitte, are unabashedly "pro-American," which is refreshing after years of French politicians defining French power in opposition to, rather than cooperation with, American power.

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AFGHANISTAN: COMMITTED BUT SKEPTICAL  
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¶3. (S/NF) Afghanistan will be an intense focus of interest as your visit immediately follows the London conference, which President Sarkozy has been pushing as a way to help sell French engagement in Afghanistan to a skeptical public. While Sarkozy said very publicly in October 2009 that France would "not send one soldier more to Afghanistan," he has reiterated publicly, as recently as January 22, his commitment that France will remain in Afghanistan "as long as necessary" to complete NATO's mission in support of the Afghan people. It remains unclear, however, whether France will make new public announcements of French contributions to Afghanistan in advance of the March elections. While France does not have the more virulent and active opposition to the war that you see in some European countries, the most recent public opinion polls show that over 80 percent of the French public is opposed to the deployment of troops in

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Afghanistan. With over 3,750 soldiers in Afghanistan, France is currently the fourth largest contributor of troops to ISAF and has lost 39 soldiers in the war, several very recently. The French were recently embarrassed by the withdrawal of France's candidate to become the EU Special Representative to Afghanistan, but they hope that naming a new UN Special Representative and NATO Senior Civilian Representative will send a strong signal of unity and improve overall civilian coordination in Afghanistan. Paris supports a follow-on meeting in Kabul, but French officials believe that it should not take place too soon, the better to allow the Afghan government to form its full cabinet and develop of detailed work program.

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IRAN: FRANCE'S STRONG STANCE  
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¶4. (S/NF) Driven by a personal conviction that time is playing against a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear issue, Sarkozy has led his government and the EU in confronting Iranian nuclear ambitions. Sarkozy publicly reiterated on January 22 that the "prospect of a nuclear armed Iran is unacceptable" and pressed for UNSC action to bring Iran to the negotiating table. The GOF is developing a package of sanctions that target the broad economic interests of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and include the areas of finance, insurance, transport, and oil and gas. The French believe Iranian elections in June changed many people's opinions about Iran and they expect the EU will support enhanced sanctions. The GOF hopes a new UN Security Council Resolution on Iran can be passed quickly, and it expects Russia will support such a move. However, it is less optimistic about China. For the past two years, the GOF has pursued rapprochement with Syria, in part for the purpose of trying to weaken Damascus's ties with Tehran. France has a citizen, Clotilde Reiss, being detained by the Iranian regime on charges of supporting anti-government protests. Last autumn, Sarkozy and Kouchner personalized this issue by

publicly condemning the actions of the Iranian government. Since then, reportedly, Sarkozy has personally managed the effort to obtain her release.

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MIDDLE EAST PEACE: IMPATIENT FOR ACTION  
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¶5. (S/NF) Sarkozy continues to push France to play a major role in finding Middle East peace, but he is impatient and often tries to rush events ahead of USG plans. For over a year, Sarkozy has promoted a high-profile peace conference in Paris, despite our cautioning that the Israeli and Palestinian sides must first show they are ready to negotiate. During a January 12 meeting, NSA Levitte told SE Mitchell that Sarkozy now wants to host a conference in the spring dedicated to strengthening the institutions of a Palestinian state. He added that, in the meantime, if progress is made on the political track, the meeting could be used to help re-launch peace talks. The French agree with us on the need to help President Abbas return to the negotiating table by offering assistance programs, guarantees, and the support of Arab leaders. However Kouchner also mentioned to SE Mitchell the controversial idea of offering to recognize a Palestinian state now, with undefined borders, or offering to recognize a Palestinian state within a defined timeline, regardless of the outcome of negotiations. Sarkozy's personal engagement in supporting the peace process is reflected in his visits to the region and in receiving Israeli, Egyptian, Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian leaders, most recently Saad Hariri January 21. France is also interested in serving as a possible intermediary to help re-launch the Syrian-Israeli peace track.

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RUSSIA: PUSHING ENGAGEMENT  
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¶6. (C/NF) President Sarkozy is convinced that engagement with Moscow is the best way to influence Russian behavior and therefore seeks to create stronger Russian linkages to western institutions. Expect Sarkozy to emphasize the importance of developing a common approach with the U.S. toward Russia that builds on the Washington-Moscow "reset" and reflects French priorities, including: promoting economic cooperation; encouraging Russia to work through institutions with set rules; publicly supporting Russian actions while taking a more honest approach in private meetings; and cultivating relations with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev, in the hope that he can become a leader independent of Vladimir Putin. Sarkozy or Kouchner may well seek to discuss our next steps with Russia, once the START talks have been completed, and they may push for an early re-launch of CFE negotiations. If pressed, Sarkozy will argue that the proposed sale of Mistral-class ships to Russia offers another opportunity to anchor Russia to Western institutions -- just as French support for an OSCE summit to discuss European security is designed to entangle Russia in a web of commitments that address the human rights and other elements of the OSCE mandate. France will have multiple opportunities to engage with senior Russian leaders this year, which the French and Russians have dubbed, "The Year of Russia in France and the Year of France in Russia." Sarkozy will visit Moscow in February, and Medvedev will visit France in March. Your meeting offers an opportunity to exchange ideas and coordinate our positions in advance of these meetings.

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NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT  
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¶7. (S/NF) France can act -- and has -- as a "force multiplier" for the United States with more passive European partners on non-proliferation issues from Iran to supporting UN counter-proliferation capacity-building efforts. We continue to work closely together on the May Review Conference for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT RevCon) to engage Non-Aligned Movement nations who resist stronger non-proliferation measures. However, the approach of the NPT RevCon highlights a policy divergence on nuclear disarmament. France argues that U.S. efforts to highlight our own disarmament commitment at the RevCon would open the door for non-aligned nations to make the conference a referendum on actual disarmament progress by the P3, rather than on proliferation concerns. As France has already made significant disarmament efforts and has a markedly smaller nuclear arsenal than the United States, French officials worry that pressure for additional cuts would negatively impact France's nuclear deterrent capabilities. The French frequently express their concern that any calls for a "world free of nuclear weapons" serve to delegitimize nuclear weapons, which are a core pillar of French defense. The French understand the United States is also committed to maintaining a nuclear deterrent force for as long as necessary, but will look to the release of the Nuclear Posture Review for hints of how the U.S. disarmament vision will translate into concrete action. Additionally, any efforts at NATO to push for even a partial rethink on the role of nuclear weapons in alliance strategy would be deeply worrying to the French.

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FRANCE A MAJOR PARTNER IN AFRICA  
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¶8. (C/NF) Under President Sarkozy, France has remained one of our strongest partners in Africa. Sarkozy has sought to put Franco-African relations on firmer, institutional grounds in contrast to the personalized leader-to-leader relationships that prevailed following French decolonization. FM Kouchner particularly appreciates his engagement with you on African issues -- particularly your close collaboration on Guinea that has borne fruit, with junta leader

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Dadis' decision not to return to Guinea and the apparent move towards elections. Other areas of important cooperation include our countering al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and other terrorist efforts in the Sahel region, combating piracy off the Horn of Africa, and seeking stability in Somalia, where the French have been active in training Somali security forces.

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COUNTER-TERRORISM/GUANTANAMO  
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¶9. (C/NF) France engages in a robust intelligence exchange with the United States on worldwide counter-terrorism issues of interest, including Afghanistan, Yemen, the Sahel, and threats to homeland security. France is particularly well-placed to support U.S. counter-terrorism goals in Africa, especially the Sahel region. In meetings with S/CT Ambassador Benjamin, French Ministry of Interior officials expressed their willingness to work with the United States on African counter-terrorism issues and asked that we coordinate our operations in the region to avoid duplication of effort. Given their

history in the region, the French would like to be seen as leading the counter-terrorism effort in the Sahel, rather than simply following us. France accepted four former Guantanamo detainees with claims to immigration status in France in July 2004 and an additional three in March 2005. France was also the first country to accept detainees without any claim to immigration status in the accepting country. In May and December 2009, France accepted two Algerian/Bosnian former detainees and resettled them in France.

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HAITI: U.S.-FRANCE COOPERATION IN RELIEF EFFORT  
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¶10. (C) Responding immediately to the earthquake on January 12, France quickly mobilized physical and financial resources to assist Haitian disaster victims and has coordinated closely with the U.S. Total French official bilateral assistance has risen to about 34 million dollars. FM Kouchner has been at the forefront of French assistance efforts, including participating in the January 25 Montreal meeting and offering to host a follow-on donors' conference on reconstruction. Leading government officials have consistently praised the work of the Obama administration on the ground and defended the need for a strong U.S. role in the emergency response, correcting short-lived stories of rising diplomatic tension after a junior minister criticized the U.S. role in Haiti on January 16. France seeks to be a partner with us on relief, including assisting orphans.

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FRANCE-CHINA RELATIONS BACK ON TRACK, FOR NOW  
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¶11. (C/NF) After a year-long campaign, Paris has successfully restored productive working relations with Beijing following a chill in relations that began with Sarkozy's December 2008 meeting with the Dalai Lama and the subsequent Chinese retaliation. France has aggressively promoted its interests in China; a series of high-level bilateral exchanges in 2009 included visits to China by the Prime Minister, the Economy Minister, and the National Assembly President. Sarkozy has agreed to open the Shanghai Expo in June, and President Hu is expected to pay an official visit this year. Despite the investment in restoring Franco-Chinese ties, Sarkozy has not shied from blaming the PRC for stalling a climate change agreement in Copenhagen, has expressed his discontent recently with China's exchange-rate policy, and is reportedly dismayed that China is getting a "free ride" while the West pays the overhead on international economic and security structures.

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THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND EXCHANGE RATES  
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¶12. (SBU) The French economy has been hit less hard by the crisis than other EU members or than the United States, in part because of an extensive social welfare system and the large proportion of government spending in GDP even in normal times. In addition, President Sarkozy moved early and vigorously to combat the crisis domestically and internationally. France is deeply engaged in managing the transition from the G8 to the G20 and will chair both groups in 2011. Sarkozy has also been militant on the need for governments to rein in the financial sector. President Obama's latest announcements on bank size and trading activities will be well received by the GOF.

¶13. (C) Sarkozy is personally preoccupied with the weakness of the dollar and exchange rate volatility more broadly. The competitiveness of French big ticket exports -- aircraft, nuclear reactors, highspeed trains -- is particularly hard hit. Consistent with his views that the state can often make better decisions than the market, Sarkozy favors a more managed exchange rate system (as well as a more regulated international oil price). He has found little support for these ideas outside France.

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CLIMATE CHANGE POST-COPENHAGEN  
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¶14. (C) The GOF supports the Copenhagen Accord and is encouraging African countries to sign on as well. Sarkozy said the Accord "is not a revolution, but it is the start of a revolution". The GOF has not yet decided on a strategy to move forward but is considering alternative negotiating groups, broader than the Major Economies Forum (MEF), but smaller than the full UN membership. Sarkozy likely has his own views on tactics. He understands the USG's conundrum of synchronizing international commitments with domestic legislative action, but is eager to have firm action by the United States.

¶15. (SBU) Madam Secretary, all three U.S. missions in Paris are looking forward to your visit and to this opportunity to discuss these important topics with one of our most active European partners. Your visit will help us leverage French global influence to advance our key policy priorities with France, around the world.  
RIVKIN